

RECREATION & PUBLIC PURPOSES ACT MEETINGS

Richard C. Knopf
Lisa Machnik
Kathleen L. Andereck



Prepared for the Phoenix Field Office
Bureau of Land Management
Phoenix, AZ

December 2002

RECREATION & PUBLIC PURPOSES ACT MEETINGS

Richard C. Knopf
Department of Recreation and Tourism Management
Arizona State University West

Lisa Machnik
Department of Recreation Management and Tourism
Arizona State University Main

Kathleen L. Andereck
Department of Recreation and Tourism Management
Arizona State University West

For
Phoenix Field Office
Bureau of Land Management
Phoenix, AZ

December 2002

RECREATION & PUBLIC PURPOSES ACT MEETINGS

As part of a larger study for the BLM, one goal was to facilitate interaction with local community planners to discuss opportunities available as a result of the Recreation and Public Purposes Act (RPPA). The facilitation efforts were confined to governmental entities in and around central Maricopa County – and transpired during the months of July and August, 2002. This report reviews the results of those facilitation efforts.

Contact History

The first stage of the project was to determine which government entities in and around central Maricopa County were viable candidates for the provisions of the RPPA. Several entities do not have access to BLM lands, either through lack of road access, physical separation by other land ownership patterns, or lack of BLM land within reasonable distance or near incorporated area. The following entities were judged to fit these limitations: *Black Canyon City, Peoria, Tempe, and Chandler*.

The second stage involved telephone contact with all other government entities in and around central Maricopa County that have a planning office and/or planning initiatives. After an explanation of the basic features of the Recreation and Public Purposes Act, a request was made for a site visit by ASU personnel to further explain the provisions of the Act and possible opportunities for the governmental entity in question.

Four government entities immediately indicated that they did not wish a follow up visit due to their familiarity with provisions of the RPPA.

These include *Glendale, Queen Creek, Gilbert, and Fountain Hills*. Representatives from unincorporated areas of Maricopa County (e.g., Morristown) declined as well, stating that they were aware of many RPPA leases in progress.

Five entities expressed clear interest in follow-up conversation: *Cave Creek, Buckeye, Apache Junction, Pinal County and Wickenburg*. Meetings were held with these entities, and the results are summarized in this chapter.

Other entities expressing initial interest in a site visit, but for which no visit was ultimately made include: *Mesa, Carefree and Phoenix*. While representatives from Mesa originally expressed interest, subsequent telephone conversations led them to conclude that eligible lands would not likely be available to their municipality. Thus, ASU was not invited for a site visit. Carefree wished to present the idea to city council for clearance before discussing it any further with ASU personnel. Following telephone conversations, Phoenix officials at the central planning office felt that no eligible lands would be available to meet their needs.

At the time of this report, four additional communities remain pending for potential site visits. They include: *Avondale, Cordes Junction, Litchfield Park, and Scottsdale*.

Site Visits

Wickenburg

Contact: Gerry Stricklin, Town Planner
602-506-1622
gstricklin46@yahoo.com

Wickenburg officials are clearly interested in RPPA lands to meet burgeoning demands for recreation and

parks over the next twenty years. They would like to acquire certain parcels within the next 10 years. The town's general plan has just been implemented, and it is scheduled for renewal in 2012.

Wickenburg officials are also interested in several public purposes projects. The first of these would be a landfill, followed by a possible fire station and a wastewater treatment plant. They have been negotiating with a private company over the possible location for a communication tower – and an eminent site is not forthcoming. The potential opportunity to use BLM land is appealing to them, and they seek clarification as to whether a private company could be involved in the partnership.

There is a current RPPA lease on a landing strip outside of town that they would be interested in purchasing when the lease is up.

Public lands that are southeast of town are very important to them as a potential buffer between Wickenburg and future growth from the Phoenix metropolitan area.

Wickenburg officials have been in conversation with BLM staff regarding the management potential of BLM lands between Prescott and I-10, and along US 60. Open space is a big concern for community residents for future management of these lands.

Wickenburg officials conveyed that it is hard to understand the processes by which BLM handles land exchange and disposition cases. They wish to know how they can be involved in processes that involve transfer to private landowners or other governmental entities. The officials would like to see clarified information in the form of policy statements addressing:

- how land is sold or transferred
- in what ways land around Wickenburg is protected or could be protected
- what specifically is the long-term use plan for the lands around Wickenburg

Of fundamental importance to Wickenburg officials is ongoing communication and coordination with the BLM. They would like complete information on what BLM is currently doing in terms of management, land exchange, and planning. They would also like to know what alternative management actions are being considered – well before ultimate actions are taken.

Finally, updated and more comprehensive maps of ownership patterns in and around public lands would be welcomed.

Apache Junction

Contact: Roger Hacker
rhacker@AJCity.Net

Apache Junction already has most of the BLM land in their service area committed through RPPA leases. While Apache Junction officials were very enthused with the site visit from ASU, they were hoping for new information about more lands being released for availability – and were disappointed that the visit did not bring with it information that the status had changed.

There is land currently held by Central Arizona College that the school would like to release, and Apache Junction has a strong interest in this parcel. They wanted to ensure that BLM was aware of this interest.

Apache Junction officials perceive that BLM could be helpful from a local and regional planning perspective. Concerns were expressed about the length of the time

needed for processing RPPA activity. They are hopeful that provisions could be made to accelerate the processes.

Another way in which BLM could be helpful to local planning initiatives would be provision of access to GIS software and mapping capacity. Apache Junction officials need to make progress in their open space planning capacity, and GIS assistance would help them more clearly identify the potential of areas for future open space management.

Pinal County

Pinal County officials note that their jurisdiction embraces a great deal of BLM land, but large portions are not accessible or inappropriate for recreational development/public purpose use due to surrounding land, floodplains, or lack of access roads.

These officials are interested in acquiring lands for future recreation and public purposes, but have no detailed plans currently. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that such plans will emerge in the immediate future. All future plans are dependant on funding resources.

Pinal County officials expressed continuing interest in BLM lands along the Gila River. But beyond these interests, specific interests in BLM lands are not well developed. However, these officials want to stay in communication with BLM, and are clearly interested in the long range potential of the RPPA.

Buckeye

Contact: Jeanine Guy, Director of Parks, Recreation, and Library Services
623-386-2778
jguy@buckeyepub.lib.az.us

Buckeye officials reported that they already have two RPPA leases in progress -- one being in collaboration with a non-profit recreation service organization. They are keenly interested in implementing additional RPPA agreements, to respond to their needs as a rapidly growing community.

In general, planning officials would like to obtain copies of the latest land status maps from BLM GIS data bases. They see such information as crucial for effective long range planning.

In particular, they have interest in expanding RPPA activity to meet growing demand for recreation and park opportunities. The town's Park and Recreation Department is in the process of developing a five year comprehensive plan, and finds it essential that RPPA leases be incorporated into the plan.

Another primary concern rests in the preservation of open space, to soften the impact of development in both the short run and the long term. The town has interest in developing rodeo/equestrian grounds, hiking and biking amenities, and general open space/park opportunities.

The town's Fire Department officials are interested in RPPA opportunities to develop a training center. The Police Department is very interested in developing an outdoor safety-related complex for training purposes -- one that would be available for public use as well. Part of the complex would incorporate a driver training center and other facilities related to transportation safety and education.

Buckeye officials are also interested in using RPPA lands for a central municipal facility for various functions as courthouses, holding facilities, and water treatment.

An RPPA site for placement of a radio/communication tower was also of interest -- although there is a possibility that the tower could be added to a current cluster already existing on BLM land.

A predominate concern of town officials centers on the increasing amount of violent crime activity (including murders) on unoccupied lands north of Interstate 10. The hope is that enhanced revenues from future land development, as well as appropriate planning and management of public lands, will mitigate such problems.

In the immediate sense, Buckeye officials would welcome the provision of maps by BLM that would provide updated detail on land ownership and road patterns. Officials wish to avoid investing significant resources into gathering data that likely already exists.

In summary, Buckeye officials are well informed of the RPPA process. However, they seek assistance from the BLM in identifying how much public land is available for RPPA, its current status, and where it is located. They also seek assistance in understanding the particulars of the application process.

Cave Creek

Contact: Larry Sahr, Senior Planner
480-595-1930
lsahr@cavecreek.org

Cave Creek officials are interested in participating in the RPPA program. In particular, they would like to increase the size of the park in the northern end of their community through RPPA activity. They are interested in expanding the park to the fullest extent allowable under the program. They have funding available through a sales tax initiative for development, and are interested in any available parcels of land suitable for recreation use. Limited BLM lands that are available close to the community, coupled with their keen interest in securing RPPA leases, raises

immediate interest in moving forward with the process.

In addition to recreational interests, the community is interested in BLM lands for the development of public works projects such as schools, a wastewater treatment plant, and a general community support operation for stores and maintenance.

The community is currently inventorying lands that may be eligible for RPPA leases. They are interested in all land available close to their community that might be eligible for lease.

Community officials seek any available information about the RPPA process, including background, other model programs, and the process of application and acquisition. They are interested in moving forward expediently. The community is very focused on preservation and protection of the natural landscape, so opportunities to combine preservation and recreation are valued. They would like to increase recreation opportunities and public service provision as Cave Creek grows.

From a regional perspective, community officials are interested in changing land use patterns in Phoenix and Scottsdale, and in changing developments and management programs within the public lands (federal, state and county) surrounding Cave Creek.

As with the other communities visited, Cave Creek officials are interested in any available maps, and any available data that describes land ownership and future development plans for areas around their community.

Key Themes from RPPA Project

In summary, several key themes emerge from this project that center on facilitating interaction with local community planners to discuss opportunities available

as a result of the Recreation and Public Purposes Act (RPPA). They are:

- Most communities within or near central Maricopa County are aware of the RPPA program, and already have leases in progress or partnerships with non-profits for leases or purchases.
- Certain communities have not been active in pursuit of the potential benefits of the RPPA program. This project has served as yet another tool for increasing visibility and awareness of its potential.
- The predominant interest expressed by communities is in procuring land for open space and park and recreation opportunities. This interest is particularly intense for communities experiencing patterns of rapid growth.
- The lengthy timeline for acquiring leases and beginning projects was expressed by a number of communities. There is a desire to streamline the process, or at least to gain information that would clarify the amount of time needed to move through benchmarks within the process.
- From the perspective of planning officials in local communities, ongoing communication with federal land managers is crucial. Communities would like to have greater clarity in understanding existing and planned land use on BLM and other public lands. There are many unanswered questions: How will changing development and land ownership affect local communities? What

are the BLM policies for land use – and how can they be accessed?

What are the long term plans for public lands in and around their communities? How can local communities be more centrally involved in decision-making through the process? What is going on within the BLM policy arena, that will their access to resources and data?

- Maps that delineate current patterns of land ownership are a common request by local communities. Access to GIS data banks is also a common interest.
- Communities tend to be very interested in RPPA, and knowledge about the program seems fairly widespread.